
Environmental and Occupational Health

Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Maine Department of Health and Human Services

The environment plays an important role in human health. Some environmental hazards have been clearly linked with specific diseases and health problems. For example, exposure to arsenic can cause bladder and other cancers; fetal and childhood methylmercury and lead exposure can result in deficits in cognitive functions; radon exposure can cause lung cancer; ground level ozone can aggravate asthma and other respiratory diseases. The contribution of these agents to chronic disease in Maine has yet to be quantified. However, the potential for exposure has been quantified:

- ❑ 10% of Maine women of childbearing age have body burdens of mercury that are too high;
- ❑ 5% of tested 1 & 2 year-old Maine children have elevated blood lead levels;
- ❑ About 50 adults are reported each year with elevated blood lead levels due to the workplace;
- ❑ 10% of Maine households with private wells have arsenic water levels above State limits;
- ❑ 30% of Maine homes have indoor air radon levels above State limits;
- ❑ 43% of Maine's population lives in counties that exceed air quality standards for ozone.



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The Environmental and Occupational Health Program (EHU) was established by the Legislature (22 MRSA, C.271(I), §1691 – 1695) to ensure that threats to the health of the people of the State posed by natural phenomena or the introduction of potentially toxic substances into the environment are identified, appropriately considered, and responded to by those responsible for protecting the public's health and environment. The designated functions of the EHU are to:

- ❑ Develop and maintain systems to monitor health status in Maine;
- ❑ Identify health problems, focusing on those which may be related to environmental factors;
- ❑ Investigate whether particular problems are related to environmental factors;
- ❑ Advise State agencies regarding potential health implications of their actions;
- ❑ Provide the public with information and preventive and corrective actions in the area of environmental health.

The EHU includes the following programs:

- ❑ Environmental Public Health Tracking;
- ❑ Environmental Toxicology;
- ❑ Childhood Lead Poisoning and Prevention;
- ❑ Occupational Disease Registry.

Priority Objectives:

- ❑ By 2010, develop and implement a statewide environmental public health tracking system;
- ❑ By 2010, increase to 90% the proportion of pregnant women who are aware of mercury in fish and the Maine CDC's Safe Eating Guidelines for fish;
- ❑ By 2010, increase to 75% the proportion of Maine households with private wells who have tested their drinking water for arsenic;
- ❑ By 2010, eliminate childhood lead poisoning;
- ❑ By 2010, decrease the number of adult occupational lead poisonings by 50%.

Funding Sources:

65% Federal; 27% General Fund; 8% Dedicated Revenue

Budget: \$1,877,952 (SFY 07)

Staff Count: 15